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BY DANIEL F. GILMORE

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Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, R-N.Y., told a joint congressional committee Thursday there is "compelling evidence" pointing to Soviet and Bulgarian complicity in the attempted assassination last year of Pope John Paul II.

D'Amato made the statement during a hearing of the Joint Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The commission, composed of six senators and six congressmen, met to hear testimony from witnesses, including Claire Sterling, an American foreign correspondent based in Rome for more than 30 years.

D'Amato, following a visit to Rome last year, reported to the CIA on his return that Vatican officials suspected Soviet involvement in the assassination attempt.

He said the commission was meeting "to consider the compelling evidence which points to complicity on the part of Bulgarian and Soviet security and intelligence forces in the attempted assassination."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, expressed concern that Ms. Sterling had not been questioned by the CIA and D'Amato said, "I'm shaken that you have not been approached by the intelligence agencies."

A CIA spokesman had no comment when asked why the agency had not talked to Ms. Sterling.

EXCERPT